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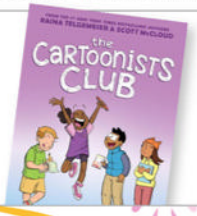

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p20

December 26, 2025/January 2, 2026
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Making sense of the world

THE WEEK Junior

THE BEST MAGAZINE FOR CURIOUS KIDS

10 historic moments

Significant and surprising events made headlines in the nation and around the world.

FACT FILE
Donald Trump and Grover Cleveland are the only US Presidents to serve two terms that were not consecutive.

President Donald Trump taking the oath of office

US leadership changes

On January 20, Donald Trump was sworn in as the nation's 47th President in a ceremony in Washington, DC. The inauguration marked the transfer of power from former President Joe Biden to Trump, who also served as the 45th President (2017–2021). At the ceremony, the incoming President and Vice President swore an oath to uphold the US Constitution (nation's highest law).

The ceremony usually takes place on the steps of the US Capitol, but this year's event was held inside the building in a room called the Rotunda due to cold temperatures of about 27° F. The last time the event was held indoors was in 1985, when Ronald Reagan was sworn in for a second term and temperatures dropped to 7° F.

As about 600 people looked on, Vice President JD Vance was sworn in first, by US Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh. Next, Chief Justice John Roberts administered the oath of office to Trump, who was joined onstage by his wife, Melania, and his five children. Biden attended the ceremony, along with the three other living former Presidents: Barack Obama, George W. Bush, and Bill Clinton. Outgoing Vice President Kamala Harris, Trump's opponent for the Presidency, and leaders of the US Congress (the branch of government that makes laws) were also there.

Later, Trump and his wife attended three inaugural parties. His family also moved into the White House, and Vance and his family moved into the Naval Observatory, where Vice Presidents live.

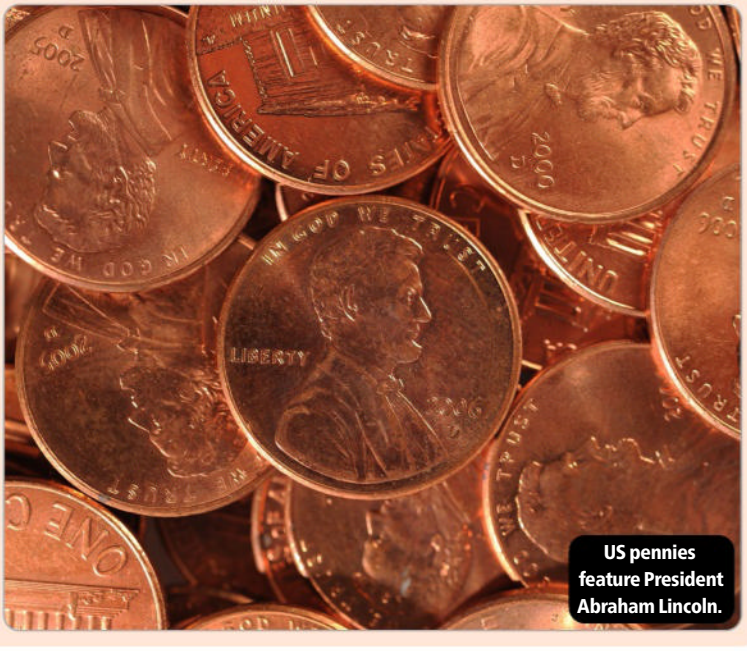
Saying goodbye to the penny

The US Mint, which creates America's coins, made its final batch of pennies on November 12, ending 232 years of production of the one-cent coin.

President Donald Trump had called for an end to penny production earlier in the year, and lawmakers from both major parties, Democrat and Republican, supported the decision. It cost the Mint nearly four cents to make and distribute each penny, and the US government anticipates saving $56 million a year by no longer producing the coins.

As long as pennies remain in circulation, they can still be used as legal money for shopping and payments. Businesses that are running low on the coins are rounding prices of their goods up or down in increments of five cents or asking customers to use exact change when paying with cash.

A Mint worker called the end of the penny "an emotional day," and journalists paid tribute to the coin as being part of US history and the inspiration for phrases like "A penny for your thoughts" and "Worth every penny."



US pennies feature President Abraham Lincoln.

NASA astronauts return

On March 18, two astronauts from NASA (the US space agency) came back to Earth after technical problems turned an eight-day mission to the International Space Station (ISS) into an extended stay of 286 days. Suni Williams and Butch Wilmore traveled to the ISS in June 2024 aboard the Starliner spacecraft, which was made by Boeing, an aerospace company.

Their mission was to test Starliner to make sure it was safe for human crew members. During the trip, however, the spacecraft leaked helium gas and had problems with its thrusters, which are used to re-enter Earth's atmosphere. Williams and Wilmore safely arrived at the ISS, but NASA engineers on the ground weren't sure Starliner could carry them back to Earth. So the pair stayed at the ISS, and Starliner traveled back without passengers.

For nine months, Williams and Wilmore joined other astronauts aboard the space station, carrying out scientific research and conducting spacewalks. Williams also set a new record for the most time a female astronaut has spent on spacewalks (62 hours and 6 minutes). The two returned to Earth on a SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule that landed off the coast of Florida. In August, Wilmore retired from NASA.

Suni Williams (left) and Butch Wilmore

An emerald and diamond necklace stolen in the robbery

Jewel heist at the Louvre

In a shocking jewelry heist at the Louvre Museum in Paris, France, on October 19, thieves made off with prized artifacts worth more than $100 million. Just after 9 a.m., two men used a truck-mounted ladder to reach a second-floor balcony, cut through a window with power tools, and entered the Apollo Gallery. They smashed through glass display cases and stole eight pieces of jewelry worn by French queens and empresses in the 1800s—including tiaras, necklaces, earrings, and a brooch.

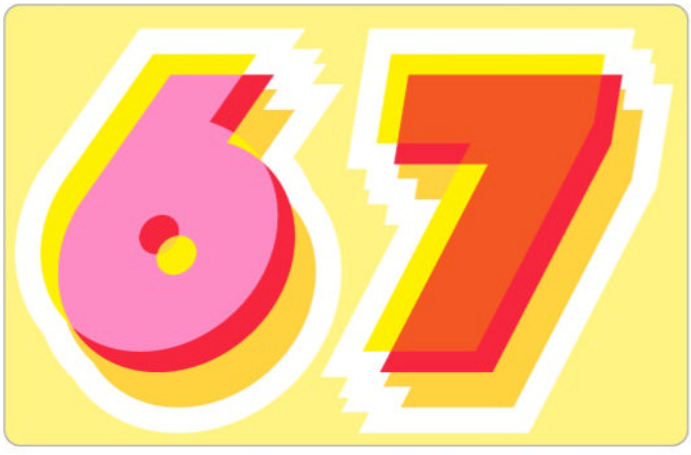
The thieves escaped on motor scooters driven by accomplices just before police arrived. The entire theft took seven minutes. French president Emmanuel Macron called the theft "an attack on a heritage that we cherish." French police have since arrested four people in connection with the crime but have not recovered the stolen jewels.

New term fascinates nation

One of the most entertaining ways to make someone laugh in 2025 was to say "6-7" while making a juggling hands gesture. Young people started the trend, and one reason it became so popular with kids, as well as adults, is that 6-7 doesn't have a precise meaning.

While some say 6-7 could mean "so-so" or "maybe this, maybe that," others say the thrill is catching people off guard by saying it. For example, pro basketball star Paige Bueckers erupted into laughter after telling reporters, "I've been here for five years, but it's felt more like 6-7."

Teachers began creating math problems with the numbers, and a Michigan music teacher wrote a song titled "67." The video of her students singing it went viral. In November, Dictionary.com named 6-7 its word of the year, saying that no other term had come close to getting as much attention.



ON THE COVER: ILLUSTRATION BY NEIL DAVEY; GETTY IMAGES (2); JOY HOWARD; THIS SPREAD: GETTY IMAGES

GLOBAL GOAL
The Security Council is the main group within the United Nations that is responsible for international peace and security.

A map showing Ukraine and Russia, in Eastern Europe

A map showing Gaza and Israel, in the Middle East

Progress being made toward peace

Global leaders are working to negotiate an end to two wars, one in Eastern Europe and the other in the Middle East.

The war in Ukraine began in February 2022 after Russia invaded its neighboring country. The US proposed a peace plan in November, calling for an immediate ceasefire and for Ukraine to give up land that Russia has seized, as well as some that is still held by Ukraine. Under the plan, Ukraine would not be able to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO, a military alliance of 32 nations). The US would guarantee, however, that Ukraine would receive military support if Russia invaded it again. Ukraine and Russia said they would continue to fight over the land, and Ukraine called for stronger security guarantees from the US. Meanwhile, fighting has continued.

On November 17, the Security Council of the United Nations (UN, group of 193 nations) approved a plan to end the war between Israel and Hamas (a terrorist group based in Gaza, a Palestinian territory) that began in October 2023. Drafted by the US, the plan called for the creation of an International Stabilization Force (ISF), a peacekeeping unit of troops from multiple countries, as well as a Board of Peace, which would oversee humanitarian aid distribution and the rebuilding of Gaza. Leadership would eventually be turned over to a group called the Palestinian Authority (PA), and Palestinian statehood could be possible. Statehood is controversial, with many countries supporting it and others—including Israel and, currently, the US—against it.

When *The Week Junior* went to press on December 16, discussions were ongoing among the warring nations and other countries that are helping to negotiate an end to the conflicts.

Jane Goodall remembered

World-famous animal scientist, environmental activist, and humanitarian Jane Goodall died on October 1 at the age of 91. Known for studying chimpanzees in Africa for 65 years, Goodall also worked tirelessly to engage young people in animal conservation.

Born in 1934 in the UK, Goodall first traveled to Africa at age 23. Her discoveries, including that chimps make and use tools, changed the study of animal behavior. She founded the Jane Goodall Institute and the Roots & Shoots program for young people and wrote 32 books. Among many awards, she received the US Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor.

At a memorial service held on November 12 in Washington, DC, Anna Rathmann, director of the Jane Goodall Institute USA, shared one of Goodall's guiding principles: "Together we can, together we will, and together we must change the world."

Jane Goodall with her stuffed monkey, Mr. H

Historic shutdown affects millions

The US government reopened on November 12 after being closed for 43 days—the nation's longest shutdown. It had begun when Congress (the branch of government that makes laws) couldn't agree on the annual budget.

The shutdown affected millions of Americans, including more than 700,000 essential government employees who had to work without pay. Funding was also suspended for the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides food assistance for about 42 million people.

The first step to ending the shutdown was for the Senate (one half of Congress) to pass a budget. Democrats rejected the Republican-led bill 14 times because it lacked funding for health-care subsidies (benefits). Without the subsidies, Democrats said, health-care costs would rise significantly for more than 20 million people. On November 10, eight Democrats joined with Republicans to pass a bill that didn't include the subsidies because, they said, the shutdown was harming Americans.

The bill passed in the House of Representatives (the other half of Congress) on November 12, and President Donald Trump signed it into law that night. SNAP benefits were restored, and federal workers received back pay. The bill is in effect only through January 2026, however. Congress will have to agree on a longer-term budget before then to prevent another shutdown.

The US Capitol, where Congress meets

DID YOU KNOW?
The first shutdown of the US government happened in 1976, under President Gerald Ford, and lasted 10 days.

Pope Leo XIV

First American pope elected

On May 8, Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost became Pope Leo XIV, the 267th leader of the worldwide Catholic Church and its 1.4 billion followers. Leo, age 70, is the first pope in the 2,000-year history of the church to be born in the US and the first from the religion's Augustinian order, which focuses on bringing people together and caring for those in need. He replaced Pope Francis, who died on April 21 at age 88.

Leo was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1955. After earning a degree in math from Villanova University, he pursued his religious education at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and became a priest in 1982. Three years later, he moved to Peru, where he served as a priest for more than 20 years. He has spent his career working to help the poor and protect the environment. Leo's family members and friends have said he plays the games Wordle and Words with Friends and is a fan of the Chicago White Sox baseball team.

Labubus become wildly popular

Often described as a mix between creatures from Maurice Sendak's book *Where the Wild Things Are* and an evil Teletubby, Labubu dolls were one of the year's biggest global toy trends. The plush collectibles, produced by the Chinese company Pop Mart, are based on characters created by Hong Kong artist Kasing Lung.

The dolls began their rise to fame when a K-pop star shared a photo with one. Because they are sold in a blind box, customers don't know which one they are buying, and this surprise element has likely added to their appeal. Some rare Labubus have been resold at many times their original cost, and in June, a giant Labubu sold at an auction in China for more than $150,000.

On November 27, Labubu characters appeared on a float in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City. Fans cheered when they saw the dolls come to life. It's amazing that so many people love them, Lung said.

Labubu dolls

GETTY IMAGES

Names that made

"I decided to have fun with this bee, and I did well, and here I am."

BREAKING BARRIERS
In 2012, Misty Copeland became the first Black female in the American Ballet Theatre's history to perform the title role in *Firebird*.

"The fact that I get to do this for a job and call it a job is insane because this is just my dream."

ACADEMIC ACHIEVER
Malala Yousafzai graduated from Oxford University in 2020 with a bachelor's degree in philosophy, politics, and economics.

"I still remember being a scared boy with big dreams of changing the world. Now I have that opportunity."

Faizan Zaki

On May 29, Faizan Zaki, a 13-year-old from Texas, won the annual Scripps National Spelling Bee, which celebrated its 100th year. Zaki, who began competing in the bee at age 7, came in second place in 2024. During this year's competition, he drew notice for his energetic stage presence, including a moment when he called a bee official "bro." He won in the 21st round after correctly spelling the word "éclaircissement," which means "a clearing up of something that is difficult to understand." He won $52,500, much of which he planned to give to charity.

Misty Copeland

Misty Copeland, the first Black female principal dancer at the American Ballet Theatre (ABT), gave her final performance on October 22 at Lincoln Center in New York City. Copeland, 43, began dancing at age 13 and joined ABT's main company in 2001 as the only Black woman among 80 dancers. Her final show included a dance from *Romeo and Juliet*. She now plans to focus on the Misty Copeland Foundation, which brings ballet to underserved communities, and her book and film projects to "make real change in how stories about dance are told."

Mason Thames

One of Hollywood's brightest stars this year was 18-year-old Mason Thames, who became the first actor in 30 years to have three consecutive number one films at the box office in a single year. In June, he starred as Hiccup in the live-action adaptation of the 2010 animated hit *How to Train Your Dragon*, which earned more than $636 million globally. He then starred in *The Black Phone 2* (rated R) in October and *Regretting You* (PG-13) in November. Thames is now filming the *How to Train Your Dragon* live-action sequel.

Malala Yousafzai

Activist Malala Yousafzai released her second memoir, *Finding My Way*, in October. Born in Pakistan, Yousafzai gained global attention around age 11 for speaking out against the Taliban, an extremist group, and its ban on girls attending school. In 2014, she became the youngest Nobel Peace Prize winner at age 17. She later founded the Malala Fund to expand education access for girls globally. Her new book explores her recent life, including mental health struggles. "I wrote this book for anyone who has felt like they don't belong," she said.

Jonny Kim

NASA astronaut Jonny Kim made history this year as the first Korean American to travel to space. In 2017, Kim, a former Navy SEAL and physician, was one of 12 people selected from about 18,300 applicants to be a NASA astronaut. Kim launched aboard Russia's Soyuz MS-27 spacecraft in April and spent eight months on the International Space Station. During his mission, Kim tested new technologies and studied how space affects the body. He completed 3,920 orbits and traveled nearly 104 million miles before landing on Earth on December 8.

GETTY IMAGES (9); BILL STAFFORD/NASA/JSC

headlines in 2025

MEGA MOVIE
Taylor Swift released a companion film, *The Official Release Party of a Showgirl*, which debuted at number one at the box office.

"I play this game, ultimately, to see what the best version of me can be."

WOW!
Avery Colvert was the youngest honoree of the TIME100 Impact Award for her work founding Altadena Girls.

"We have all felt like Stitch at some point. But with the right love, even the misunderstood can become a legend."

STAR POWER
In 2019, Alysa Liu became the youngest US women's figure skating national champion in history, at age 13.

Taylor Swift

Pop superstar Taylor Swift achieved major music milestones in October with her 12th studio album, *The Life of a Showgirl*. Before its release, it became the most pre-saved album in Spotify history. Shortly after, Swift became the first US female artist to surpass 100 million certified album sales. The album sold nearly 4 million copies in its first week. Its lead single, "The Fate of Ophelia," also set a Spotify record for the most streams in 24 hours. In December, Swift was named Spotify's most streamed artist in the US and the second most worldwide in 2025.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander

Known as "SGA," Oklahoma City Thunder star Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had one of the most remarkable years in NBA (National Basketball Association) history. In June, he led the Thunder to its first-ever NBA championship and was named the Most Valuable Player of both the regular season and the Finals. SGA also earned two ESPY Awards for Best Athlete in Men's Sports and Best NBA Player. Now, with the 2025–26 season underway, he has scored at least 20 points in more than 90 straight games, the NBA's second-longest streak.

Avery Colvert

When wildfires devastated Los Angeles, California, in January, 14-year-old Avery Colvert stepped in to help. She launched the Altadena Girls fund to collect clothing, beauty products, and other essentials for teens who lost their homes. The effort went viral, drawing donations from major brands and support from celebrities. In October, Colvert opened the first permanent Altadena Girls location in nearby Pasadena, with a free clothing store and a podcast studio. She hopes to continue "doing work that helps people and builds community," she said.

Chris Sanders

Filmmaker and animator Chris Sanders had a standout year in 2025. It began with an Oscar nomination for *The Wild Robot*, which he directed, for Best Animated Feature. Then, 23 years after co-creating the animated classic *Lilo & Stitch* and voicing Stitch himself, Sanders returned to voice the mischievous blue alien for the hit live-action adaptation. The film premiered in May, setting box office records. In July, it became the first movie of 2025 to surpass $1 billion worldwide. "I like that the story and the characters have endured," Sanders said. "It was my wish."

Alysa Liu

At the 2025 World Figure Skating Championships in March, Alysa Liu became the first American woman in 19 years to win gold in the women's singles event. Her victory was even more remarkable because she had retired in 2022 at age 16 and returned last year because she missed competing. In December, she won the women's title at the ISU Grand Prix Final, scoring a season's-best 222.49 points. "I love to perform," Liu said after her win. "I want to satisfy my curiosity, and that includes doing it in an arena where people are watching me."

Tales from the wild

The year included promising recoveries, exciting discoveries, and a major victory for nature.

HELLO OUT THERE! A tiger's roar can be heard nearly two miles away, thanks to their super-stretchy vocal cords.

A Siberian tiger

Tigers rebound in India

The population of tigers in India has doubled over a period of 12 years, a new study found. According to government data, the big cats' numbers increased from 1,706 tigers in 2010 to 3,682 in 2022. This means that about 75% of the world's tigers now live in India.

Tigers once lived across much of Asia, but in the past 100 years, their range has been reduced by 93% because of poaching (illegal hunting), loss of habitat, and declines in their prey. Today, tigers are endangered, and three subspecies—Bali, Javan, and Caspian tigers—are extinct.

Since 1973, the Indian government has been working to save the animals through an initiative called Project Tiger. It has created strong anti-poaching laws and expanded tiger reserves from nine to more than 50 protected areas throughout the country. Conservation organizations have also been working to protect habitats, support tiger populations, and help people live peacefully alongside tigers. Since 2006, the tigers' range has expanded by about 30%. It now covers about 53,359 square miles, approximately the size of New York state.

Researchers said the results showed that conservation can benefit both animals and people and that the two can coexist successfully even when they live close together.

Oceans gain legal rights

The Constitutional Court of Ecuador ruled that marine ecosystems (groups of plants and animals that affect one another) on the country's coast have legal rights.

Ecuador's Pacific waters are a habitat for manta rays, sharks, whales, dolphins, and sea turtles. Fishers filed a lawsuit hoping to end a restriction on industrial fishing within a nine-mile area of the coast. The court ruled against the fishers, saying that this protected zone has helped increase fish populations. Explaining that oceans and seas are essential to the planet, the court affirmed that marine ecosystems have a legal right to maintain their natural functions and processes. This includes having stable animal populations, water temperatures, and salt levels.

As a result, Ecuador's government must protect marine ecosystems from threats such as overfishing. Lawyer Hugo Echeverria said, "The decision opens the door to a new perspective, a blue perspective, on the rights of nature."

Sea life in Ecuador

A peregrine falcon

Peregrine falcons thrive in cities

Growing numbers of peregrine falcons appear to be successfully living in big cities in the US, the Associated Press reported. Conservationists see this as a promising sign because peregrine populations in other parts of the country have been declining as the avian flu has spread among many types of birds. Falcons on the coasts are especially vulnerable since their prey—waterfowl such as ducks and geese—tend to gather in large groups, which makes it easier for the disease to spread.

Peregrines living in cities have not been as affected by bird flu. These resourceful birds have established homes on buildings, bridges, and other structures. Some falcons that hatch in cities are now moving to shoreline areas as they grow up, which could also help coastal populations bounce back. "Wildlife can really adapt to these harsh urban environments," said Christopher Nadareski, a scientist with New York City's Department of Environmental Protection. "They still find ways to survive."

Returning after wildfires

In January, wildfires swept through Los Angeles, California. A few months later, a group of scientists and volunteers said plants and animals had begun returning to parts of the city that had suffered great damage. Coyotes were among the first animals to come back. Next, grass and plants such as elderberry and black sage began to regrow, attracting deer to graze. Bobcats, squirrels, and owls also returned, and a California newt was spotted in late March. In one of the most notable sightings, on March 26, a mountain lion appeared in camera footage for the first time since the fires. A week later, a female mountain lion was seen with two cubs.

Monitoring the recovery of local wildlife has provided special opportunities for research. "We are pretty excited about what we can potentially learn about nature coming back," said Kristen Ochoa, a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles. "Nature is resilient and, for me, it helps me feel resilient as well."

Coyotes made a comeback in California.

BABY BLANKET Loggerhead sea turtles spend some of their early life floating among seaweed, which provides warmth and protection.

A baby loggerhead

Sea turtles "dance" with joy

Young loggerhead sea turtles "dance" when they expect food. This behavior helped scientists make an important discovery.

During loggerhead sea turtles' migration journeys, they can navigate by sensing Earth's magnetic fields. Now a study has found that loggerheads can also recognize specific areas by learning the magnetic signals associated with them. Loggerhead turtle hatchlings were repeatedly placed in two buckets with different magnetic fields. In one of the buckets, they were fed.

Eventually, whenever the turtles were exposed to that magnetic field, they began to "dance." Researcher Kayla Goforth explained, "When they get really excited, they stick their heads out, they slap their flippers wildly, they spin in place sometimes." This suggested they had learned to associate the magnetic signal with food. Understanding how this process works could help humans avoid disrupting the signals that are important to animals.

GETTY IMAGES (3); ON LEFT PAGE: GETTY IMAGES (2)

Amazing

In the lab and in space, scientists searched the past and shaped the future.

SLOW CHANGES Over the course of millions of years, birds evolved from a type of dinosaur called a theropod, which includes Tyrannosaurus rex.

An artist's rendering of Baminornis zhenghensis

Fossil revises evolution

The timeline of bird evolution was rewritten this year with the study of a prehistoric bird that lived 150 million years ago. Called Baminornis zhenghensis, it is likely the oldest bird ever discovered and the second bird known to have lived during the Jurassic period. The first, called Archaeopteryx, was found in Germany. Half bird and half reptile, Archaeopteryx had so many dinosaur-like features that it helped scientists determine that birds evolved from dinosaurs.

For more than 150 years after Archaeopteryx was found, however, no other birds from that period were discovered, leaving a gap in knowledge about bird evolution. Scientists knew other flying birds must have existed, and B. zhenghensis finally offered proof. Archaeopteryx and B. zhenghensis had key differences. Archaeopteryx was about the size of a modern crow and could fly only in short bursts. B. zhenghensis was smaller—about the size of a modern quail. Like modern birds, it had a short tail that helped it fly smoothly.

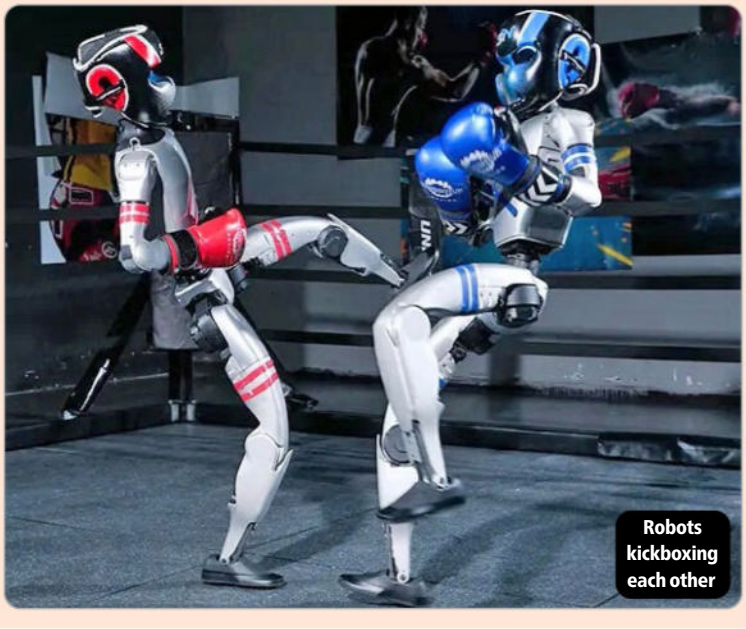
The development of short tails was crucial in helping birds evolve into better flyers. The tail on B. zhenghensis indicated that it was further along in the evolutionary process than Archaeopteryx. Before B. zhenghensis was discovered, scientists had only found birds with short tails that lived about 20 million years later. But B. zhenghensis suggested that bird evolution started millions of years earlier than previously realized.

AI continues to expand

Artificial intelligence, or AI, is technology that allows a computer to learn and adapt like humans do. This year, its role in our daily lives has continued to grow. Although there are many concerns about AI, including that it will take jobs from people and provide incorrect answers when used to gather information, the technology has led to several big breakthroughs.

In medicine, an AI "brain decoding" tool tracked the brain waves of people who struggle with spoken language, turning their thoughts into text so they could communicate. An AI stethoscope quickly detected heart conditions in patients, while specially trained dogs and AI worked together to detect cancer in people.

AI also changed how people write and talk to each other. The AI platform ChatGPT used certain words so many times that humans started using them more too. Meanwhile, an AI program restored precious paintings within hours. And human-like AI robots competed in a kickboxing ring, making decisions in real time and adjusting their balance and movement accordingly.



Robots kickboxing each other

One of the mice

Scientists create woolly mice

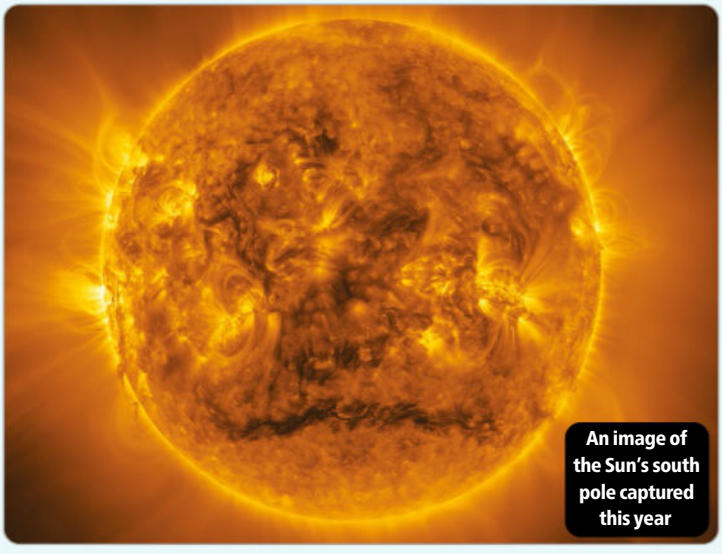
Woolly mice with thick, golden-brown hair were created by scientists at a company called Colossal Biosciences, who edited the animals' genes (short sections of DNA, a chemical that carries all the instructions for how a living thing should grow and develop). Colossal created the mice as a step toward their larger goal of bringing a version of the extinct woolly mammoth to life. The scientists hope to do that by editing the genes of Asian elephants, the mammoths' closest living relative. For practical purposes, they tested the process on mice rather than elephants.

Woolly mammoths had thick fur and pockets of fat that kept them warm in frigid temperatures. To re-create those features in mice, scientists "switched off" or changed genes related to their fur's texture, length, and color, as well as their fat. Sure enough, the woolly mice had wavier, longer, and more golden-colored fur than a regular mouse and fat similar to a mammoth's. The furry creatures currently live at Colossal's offices in Texas.

Sun's surface revealed

The first images ever taken of the Sun's south pole were released by the European Space Agency (ESA). Captured by the ESA's Solar Orbiter spacecraft, which launched in 2020, they are the most detailed images ever taken of the solar surface. They reveal a shimmering atmosphere that can reach temperatures of about 18,000,000° F and darker clouds of gas that reach 18,000° F.

The Solar Orbiter also revealed that the magnetic field at the Sun's south pole was in a chaotic period known as the "solar maximum," which happens every 11 years. During this temporary period, solar storms can travel toward Earth and cause disruption to electronic devices, including phones, although they don't cause direct harm to humans. In the coming years, the orbiter is expected to capture even better images of the Sun's poles, which could help researchers develop computer models to predict the Sun's activity and allow people on Earth to prepare for solar storms.


An image of the Sun's south pole captured this year

Animal posts connect us

A study found that sharing social media posts about animals—pictures of splooting squirrels, videos of cats in costume, or memes of smiling dogs—can strengthen our relationships. Scientists compared it to "pebbling," which is when one gentoo penguin gives a rock to another one to show affection.

Researchers found that animal posts often include emotional cues, like a heartfelt caption or playful music. When people forward these posts to loved ones, they often add comments that acknowledge a shared interest or history. For example, someone might send a puppy post to a sibling and say it looks like their childhood dog. Or a friend might share a video of two baby pandas trying to stand up and add the note "Us at our first yoga class."

When we "pebble" people with animal posts, we're not just passing along cute, funny memes or videos, the researchers said. We're reflecting on our relationships and showing that we care.

COLOSSAL BIOSCIENCES; ESA & NASA/SOLAR ORBITER/EUI TEAM, E. KRAAIKAMP (ROB); GETTY IMAGES; ON LEFT PAGE: CHUANG ZHAO/HANDOUT; UNITREE

Photos of the year

Sky light
In June, the full Strawberry Moon was seen around the world, including behind this violinist in Iraq.

Sacred send-off
At a temple in Indonesia, a lantern was released for Buddha's birthday.

Hanging on
This image of a European tree frog was shot in the UK.

GETTY IMAGES (6)

Photos of the year

Who, me?
This photo of a snowy owl was taken in the US.

Night bright
A street in China was decorated for Lunar New Year.

Honoring tradition
Children with brightly painted faces took part in an event in India.

Athletic excitement

Impressive victories, memorable feats, and thrilling debuts sparked celebrations.

TOP HONOR
Los Angeles Dodgers star Shohei Ohtani was named the National League MVP by a unanimous vote for the third consecutive season.

The Dodgers after Game 7

Dodgers win World Series

For the second year in a row, the Los Angeles Dodgers are Major League Baseball's champions. On November 1, in a thrilling winner-take-all Game 7 of the World Series, they beat the Toronto Blue Jays to become the first repeat champions since 2000.

The Dodgers delivered many unforgettable moments in the series. Game 2 featured a standout complete-game performance by Dodgers pitcher Yoshinobu Yamamoto, and Game 3 was a historic contest that lasted 18 innings—twice as long as usual. After six hours and 39 minutes, Dodgers star Freddie Freeman hit a game-ending home run for the win.

A second superb outing by Yamamoto helped the Dodgers win Game 6. The next day in Game 7, he returned to the mound in the ninth inning with the scored tied and helped the Dodgers send the game to extra innings and ultimately win. Afterward, he was named the Most Valuable Player of the World Series. In total, he pitched 17⅔ innings, struck out 15 batters, and gave up only two runs.

New leagues in women's sports

The opportunities for female athletes to play sports at the professional level grew significantly this year. Several leagues made their debuts, while the Women's Pro Baseball League held tryouts and a draft to begin building the teams for its inaugural season in 2026.

Unrivaled, a 3-on-3 women's basketball league cofounded by two WNBA (Women's National Basketball Association) stars, kicked off in January. It was popular with fans as well as WNBA players because many of them can now play in the US during the off-season instead of joining teams overseas. In February, the WLL (Women's Lacrosse League) made its debut, and in March, WER (Women's Elite Rugby) began its inaugural season. It is the first professional league of its kind in the US.

In June, the AUSL (Athletes Unlimited Softball League) played its first two games in front of sold-out crowds. To bring attention to the league, the AUSL's four teams played in 10 cities this season. On opening day, Cat Osterman, general manager of one of those teams, the Volts, said, "Today is the first day of something very incredible."

Women's Elite Rugby players

Jalen Hurts

Eagles soar in the NFL

On February 9, the Philadelphia Eagles and the Kansas City Chiefs met in the Super Bowl, the championship game of the NFL (National Football League). The game was a rematch of the 2023 Super Bowl, which the Chiefs won. This time, the Eagles dominated and came away with a 40–22 victory and their second NFL Super Bowl win.

The Eagles were 2–2 early in the regular season, but they won 15 of their next 16 games before the Super Bowl. Heading into that game, the pressure was on the Chiefs, who were attempting to become the only team to win the Super Bowl three years in a row. However, the Eagles defense was strong from the start, and they intercepted Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes twice in the first half. By halftime, the Eagles were leading, 24–0. Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts was named the Most Valuable Player. He threw for 221 yards and two touchdowns, and ran for 72 yards and another touchdown.

WNBA star shines

A'ja Wilson of the Las Vegas Aces was a winner on and off the basketball court. In May, the WNBA (Women's National Basketball Association) star unveiled her first sneaker for Nike, the A'One, which sold out online in less than five minutes. Then, in August, she became the league's first player to rack up at least 30 points and at least 20 rebounds in a game. She had such a strong regular season that in September, she won the scoring title, was named the WNBA's Most Valuable Player (MVP) for the second straight year, and was the Co-Defensive Player of the Year (DOPY).

In the postseason, she led the Aces to their third championship in four years, sweeping the Phoenix Mercury in the Finals. Wilson averaged 28.5 points, 11.8 rebounds, four assists, and two blocks per game and was the Finals MVP. She is the first WNBA or NBA (National Basketball Association) player to win MVP, Finals MVP, DOPY, the scoring title, and the championship in the same season.

A'ja Wilson

Alex Ovechkin

HOW IT STARTED
Alex Ovechkin scored his first two NHL goals on October 5, 2005.

Hockey record broken

April 6 was a historic day in the NHL (National Hockey League). That afternoon, Alex Ovechkin of the Washington Capitals scored his 895th career goal, the most ever by an NHL player. He broke a 31-year-old record held by hockey legend Wayne Gretzky, who retired from the league in 1999.

Ovechkin, age 40, joined the NHL in 2004 and has averaged 49 goals per season. He is the only NHL player to score 200 or more goals over three decades. His record-breaking 895th goal came in a game against the New York Islanders. After he scored, he slid on his belly and was surrounded by his teammates. Although the Capitals were the visiting team, the crowd went wild. Gretzky joined him on the ice for a brief ceremony.

On November 5, Ovechkin hit another milestone when he scored his 900th career NHL goal, which he called "a special moment." When *The Week Junior* went to press, he was up to 911.

GETTY IMAGES (3); ON LEFT PAGE: GETTY IMAGES; SEAN HALE @SEAN HALEYEAH

Pop culture superstars

Unforgettable characters, a singer breaking barriers, and a new museum wowed fans.

A surprise megahit

This summer, *KPop Demon Hunters* began streaming on Netflix. The animated film introduced the world to Rumi, Mira, and Zoey—otherwise known as the K-pop (Korean pop music) trio HUNTR/X—who must save the world from an evil boy band. Netflix expected that the movie would attract mostly kids and families, but it gained a wider following and became the platform's most streamed film ever.

Not only was it a success on screens, but in August, HUNTR/X's song "Golden" became a number one hit and the film's soundtrack was a Top 10 album. (Singers EJAE, Audrey Nuna, and Rei Ami perform HUNTR/X songs.) The same month, a sing-along version of *KPop Demon Hunters* hit theaters and was the number one film at the box office.

The film was co-written and co-directed by Maggie Kang, who moved to Canada from South Korea as a child. She said a goal was to make the story "feel as Korean as possible," and it was praised for its cultural authenticity. There are Korean-language lines in the songs, and the characters use the Korean pronunciation of English words. *KPop Demon Hunters* has also been celebrated in the music and film worlds. "Golden" was nominated for four Grammy Awards, including Song of the Year, and the soundtrack was also nominated. The film received three Golden Globe nominations, including one for Best Animated Feature.

Peanuts turns 75

October 2 marked the 75th anniversary of *Peanuts*, the popular comic strip by Charles M. Schulz that featured Charlie Brown and his dog, Snoopy, and inspired animated films, TV shows, and a stage musical. Several museums, including the Charles M. Schulz Museum in Santa Rosa, California, showcased exhibitions that paid tribute to *Peanuts* history and humor. Benjamin L. Clark, curator (person who chooses art) of the Schulz museum, told *The Week Junior* that Schulz "found interesting and funny ways to address big universal themes in his characters, such as loneliness, rejection, and anxiety." He added that *Peanuts* gets people to think about life's big questions, brings comfort, and "is perfect for just about any person in any situation."

MAKING HISTORY
In 2025, Bad Bunny became the first Latin artist to have a career total of 100 songs make it onto Billboard's Hot 100 chart.

Bad Bunny

Big year for Bad Bunny

In January, Latin music star Bad Bunny released his sixth studio album, *Debí Tirar Más Fotos* (translation: *"I Should Have Taken More Photos"*), and kicked off a year of major achievements. The album debuted at number one, and all 17 tracks eventually landed on the Billboard Hot 100 chart.

Over the summer, the singer had a two-month series of sold-out concerts in Puerto Rico, his home island, which brought an estimated $733 million to the local economy. In November, he was nominated for six Grammy Awards and became the first Spanish-language artist to be up for Best Album, Record, and Song nominations in one year. That followed a big success at the Latin Grammys, where he was up for 12 awards—the most of any artist this year—and won five, including Album of the Year.

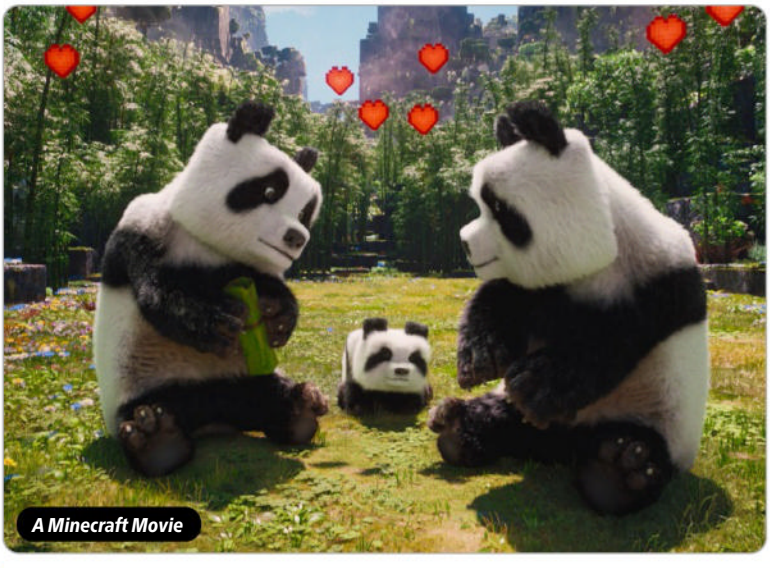
He ended the year as the most streamed artist globally on Spotify, the world's largest music streaming platform, and will start 2026 with another big moment: headlining the Super Bowl Halftime Show in February.

Museum for dino fans

The Edelman Fossil Park and Museum of Rowan University opened in New Jersey in March. Inside the museum, visitors can learn about dinosaurs as well as ways to help safeguard the Earth's future. A gallery that focuses on the Cretaceous period (145 to 66 million years ago) is filled with more than 50 dinosaur re-creations and other prehistoric creatures. Sounds, lights, and vegetation also help re-create the dinosaurs' world.

Other areas of the museum focus on ancient marine life as well as creatures that lived on the east coast of North America. The building is located in a region where dinosaur skeletons have been found and next to a quarry where experts have recovered more than 100,000 fossils of marine and land animals. Paleontologist and geologist Kenneth Lacovara, the museum's founding executive director, told *The Week Junior*, "We have one of the most incredible windows in the world into the last moments of the dinosaurs."

A mosasaur



A Minecraft Movie

Minecraft Movie madness

One of the world's most popular video games spawned one of the year's biggest films. *A Minecraft Movie*, released in April, thrilled audiences and has taken in more than $957 million worldwide. The action-adventure is about a group of misfits who travel to the Overworld, the game's primary dimension, where they are guided by expert crafter Steve (played by Jack Black).

The film's director, Jared Hess, told *The Week Junior* he hoped the film would inspire audiences "to embrace teamwork, courage, and creativity just like our heroes in the movie." The film also inspired audiences to go a bit wild. When a baby zombie character is dropped on a chicken in the film, it became a trend for moviegoers to scream "Chicken jockey!" with Steve and throw popcorn. Regal theaters embraced the chaos and held special Chicken Jockey screenings, encouraging fans to attend dressed as their favorite character and make noise while watching the film.

GETTY IMAGES; EDELMAN FOSSIL PARK & MUSEUM OF ROWAN UNIVERSITY; WARNER BROS. PICTURES; ON LEFT PAGE: NETFLIX; PEANUTS WORLDWIDE LLC

Donkey Kong Bananza

WALL OF WONDER
There is a five-story mural of the original Donkey Kong game in Concord, New Hampshire.

Our pick for game of the year

Donkey Kong Bananza is a platforming adventure game that was released in July exclusively for the Nintendo Switch 2. It has been so popular that it became one of the best-selling games on that platform this year.

The first Donkey Kong game came out in 1981 and featured the Mario character (then called Jumpman) trying to rescue his girlfriend, Pauline, from Donkey Kong. In the new game, Pauline is reinvented as a 13-year-old singer.

The game is set on Ingot Isle, where apes have just struck gold. DK, as he is often called, is there to get his hands on golden bananas, which are broken into Banandium gems, but he ends up getting sucked underground during a storm. Even worse, thieving monkeys who are part of the evil Void Company steal the golden bananas.

DK soon befriends a talking purple rock that turns out to be Pauline, who wants to get home. The pair team up to fight their way to the core of the Underground World. Legend has it that anyone who makes it there has their wishes granted. As they travel through different climates and habitats, Donkey Kong has the ability to smash through everything, and Pauline's singing voice can turn him into a supersize ape, a zebra, and a flying ostrich. They also get help from classic DK characters such as Diddy Kong, Cranky Kong, and Dixie Kong. A game like this would typically be for one player, but the Switch 2's GameShare mode allows a second player to control Pauline online or locally.

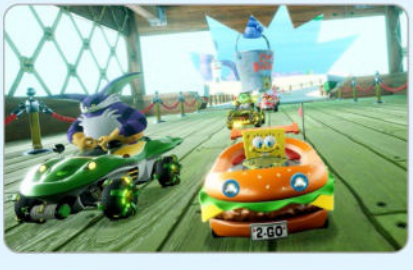
Donkey Kong Bananza won the Critics' Choice Award at the Golden Joystick Awards and was named the Best Family game at the Game Awards.

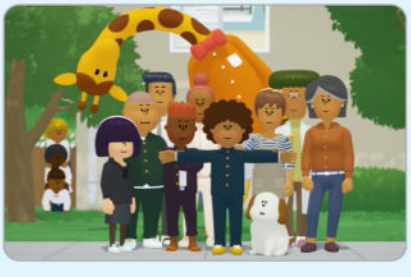
RUNNER-UP GAMES OF THE YEAR

SONIC RACING: CROSSWORLDS

Nintendo Switch and Switch 2, PlayStation platforms, Xbox systems, PC

The blue blur and his friends—plus some special guest stars—are the drivers in this racing game. You can choose from four types of base vehicles or create custom karts and race them on the 39 tracks that include a Minecraft world.





TOAT

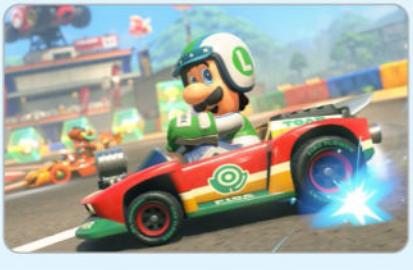
PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X/S, PC

This episodic 3D adventure is about a teen whose arms are stuck outward. Part of the challenge is helping the character do everyday activities, such as participating in gym class. A perk of the T body shape: The teen can spin and fly. The game has good lessons about the idea of being "perfect."

MARIO KART WORLD

Nintendo Switch 2

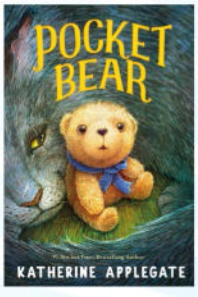
The first game released for the Nintendo Switch 2 is set in a world with connected, explorable regions. There are two fun major racing modes, and some races can have up to 24 participants. You also can go off-roading and take on various missions and challenges along the way.



NINTENDO (2); SEGA; ANNAPURNA INTERACTIVE

10 terrific reads in 2025

BEST ADVENTURE STORY
The Trouble with Heroes
By Kate Messner (Bloomsbury)
Packed with emotion, this story is about a boy's quest to climb 46 peaks in New York's Adirondack Mountains. When he begins, he's defiant and grieving the loss of his father, a hero firefighter. As he conquers each peak with a dog that belongs to a famous local hiker, his anger starts to fade. *Ages 8 and up*

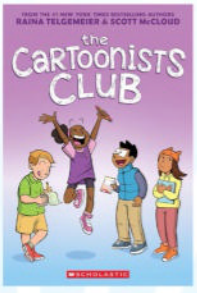


BEST ANIMAL STORY
Pocket Bear
By Katherine Applegate, illustrated by Charles Santoso (Feiwel & Friends)
In this historically inspired tale, a cat rescues what may be one of the world's first stuffed bears from the trash. When an evil collector arrives and senses the bear's value, the cat, as well as Pocket Bear, another character, hatch a plan to outsmart him. *Ages 8–12*

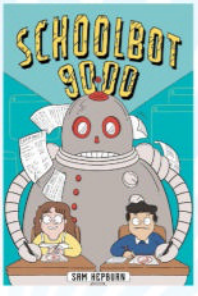
BEST GHOST STORY
Free Piano (Not Haunted)
By Whitney Gardner
(Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers)
After a girl brings home an abandoned keyboard, she finds out that the ghost of a 1980s pop star lives inside it. The friendly spirit seems to be the perfect collaborator to boost the views of her music videos. This original story strikes the right chord. *Ages 8–12*

BEST NEW FANTASY SERIES
Dragonborn
By Struan Murray (Penguin Random House)
At this novel's start, a girl who is frustrated by her mom's overprotectiveness spits fire and learns she has dragon blood! She finds refuge in a hidden realm of mythical creatures. Through exhilarating battles and stunning twists, this debut of a new series tackles its heroine's emotions in a terrific way. *Ages 8–12*

BEST FOR SPORTS FANS
Inside the Park
By Andrea Williams (HarperCollins)
It's the baseball version of *Home Alone*! A boy and a dog accidentally get locked inside a minor league stadium at night. They are enjoying unlimited access in the ballpark, until they realize that villains are also in the stadium. The bad guys want to sabotage the championship game. Can they be stopped? *Ages 8–12*

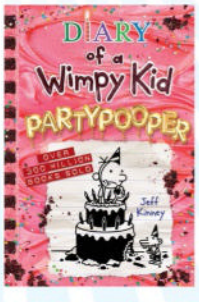


BEST FOR COMIC FANS
The Cartoonists Club
By Raina Telgemeier and Scott McCloud (Graphix)
This graphic novel excels at being two books in one—a fun story about a group of kids starting a comic club at school and a how-to guide for readers who want to create their own comics. The storylines converge at a convention, where the club members are selling mini-comics they made. *Ages 8–12*

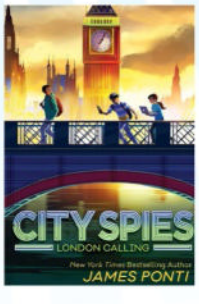


BEST NEW GRAPHIC NOVEL SERIES
SchoolBot 9000
By Sam Hepburn (Dial Books)
In this thought-provoking tale that explores the pros and cons of AI, a boy who bemoans the use of robots at home is now faced with having one in school. Many of his fears come to fruition when the robot, which was supposed to support his human teachers, starts to take over the classroom. *Ages 8–12*

BEST FOR CREATIVE STORYTELLING
The Incredibly Human Henson Blayze
By Derrick Barnes (Viking)
This gripping story stars Henson, a Black high school football player who is a local hero in his mostly white town. But when he leaves a game at halftime to go to the hospital to see a friend who's been hurt in an unjust act, many people are upset with him. This prompts Henson to grapple with his future. *Ages 10 and up*



BEST FOR LAUGHS
Partypooper
By Jeff Kinney (Amulet Books)
The 20th book in the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series is one of the funniest yet. Greg thinks his family is planning a surprise birthday party for him, but it turns out they forgot his birthday. When they try to hold a make-up celebration, absurd and hilarious misunderstandings ensue in true Wimpy Kid fashion. *Ages 8 and up*



BEST MYSTERY
City Spies: London Calling
By James Ponti (Aladdin)
The sixth book in the *City Spies* series delivers its most heart-pumping adventure yet. The spy kids split up to tackle two missions: the disappearance of a team member's sister in Turkey and a plan to sabotage a wedding in London. As the plots come together, you may find the pages turning themselves! *Ages 8–12*

BOOKS: COURTESY OF PUBLISHERS

Make readers' favorite recipes

Kids loved whipping up this smoothie, lunch, snack, and dessert in 2025.

MANGO ICY

Ingredients

- 2 cups frozen mango
- 4 teaspoons honey
- Juice of 2 limes
- Lime wedges, for garnish (optional)
- Chili lime seasoning, for garnish (optional)

Instructions

1. Combine mango, honey, and lime juice in a blender with 1½ cups ice and ½ cup water. Blend until smooth. If needed, add water 1 tablespoon at a time to get desired consistency.
2. Evenly divide between two glasses and garnish each with a lime wedge and a sprinkle of chili lime seasoning, if using. Drink immediately. Makes 2 servings.

WARNING! Ask an adult's permission before using a knife, oven, stove, mixer, or blender.

TASTY TOPPING Everything bagel seasoning is made of poppy seeds, sesame seeds, dried garlic, dried onion, and salt.

EVERYTHING BAGEL PASTA WITH CHEESE AND BROCCOLI

Ingredients

- 1 large broccoli crown, cut into florets
- 12 ounces cavatappi pasta
- 1⅓ cups ricotta
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 3 tablespoons everything bagel seasoning, plus more for serving
- ½ teaspoon lemon zest
- Kosher salt
- Black pepper

Instructions

1. Place a large, heat-safe bowl on a countertop near the stove. With an adult's help, bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the broccoli and cook 4 minutes.
2. With the water still boiling and with an adult's assistance, use a slotted spoon to remove the broccoli from the pot and place in the heat-safe bowl.
3. Add the pasta to the boiling water and cook according to package directions. With an adult's help, drain and add the pasta to the bowl with the broccoli, reserving ¾ cup pasta water.
4. Quickly add the ricotta, Parmesan, bagel seasoning, and lemon zest to the pasta bowl.
5. Add ½ cup of the reserved pasta water, and use a spatula to stir together the ingredients until saucy and creamy. If needed, add more pasta water, 1 tablespoon at a time. Taste then season with salt and pepper as desired.
6. Serve immediately with more bagel seasoning for sprinkling. Makes 6 servings.

JOY HOWARD

PEPPERONI PIZZA PEPPER POPPERS

Ingredients

- 6 mini bell peppers
- ¼ cup pizza sauce
- 1 cup grated mozzarella cheese
- 2 ounces pepperoni, chopped
- Optional toppings: olives, fresh basil, corn, chopped jalapeños or tomatoes, marinated artichokes, ricotta cheese, pre-cooked chopped or shredded chicken

Instructions

1. Heat oven to 400° F. Rinse the mini bell peppers, then halve each lengthwise. Scoop out the peppers' membranes (the white part inside) and seeds and discard.
2. Arrange peppers with the cut side facing up on a baking sheet. If a pepper leans too much to one side, you can prop it up with the support of a small ball of aluminum foil.
3. Spoon 1 teaspoon pizza sauce into each pepper. Top with a sprinkling of cheese and pepperoni. You can also use other toppings of your choice (see ingredients).
4. Bake peppers until cheese is melted and bubbly and peppers have softened, about 7 minutes.
5. Remove peppers from oven and let cool slightly before eating. Makes 3 servings.

FUN FACT
Eton mess is a British dessert that is believed to have originated in the 1890s at Eton College in the UK.

STRAWBERRY ETON MESS

Ingredients

- 1 pound fresh strawberries
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 1¾ cups heavy cream
- ¼ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 tablespoons powdered sugar
- 3 cups meringue cookies, broken into pieces

Instructions

1. In a medium bowl, stir together the strawberries and sugar. Let sit 10 minutes, then use a fork or masher to crush half the berries and stir once more. Set aside.
2. In another bowl, combine the heavy cream, vanilla, and powdered sugar. Use a hand mixer to whip until stiff peaks form. Gently fold in the meringue cookies.
3. Spoon a heaping tablespoon of the berry mixture into 4 parfait glasses or clear mugs or cups.
4. Top each with ⅛ of the meringue mixture, followed by ⅛ of the remaining berries. Repeat the layers. Serve immediately. Makes 4 servings.

Try fun and colorful crafts

This year's most popular projects focused on reading and writing.

CUSTOM BOOKPLATES

What you'll need

- Scissors
- White block erasers (found online or at office-supply stores)
- Pencil with a new eraser
- A coin or small cookie cutters
- Ink pad
- All-purpose blank labels or name-tag stickers (from stationery, office-supply, or online stores)
- Baby wipes or paper towels
- Markers
- Rubber stamps of letters (optional)

Instructions

1. Use scissors to cut some erasers into geometric shapes, like squares, triangles, and rectangles.
2. Use a pencil and a coin or small cookie cutters to trace shapes, such as circles or hearts, onto other erasers. You can also hand-draw shapes, like leaves. With scissors, cut the shapes out of the erasers.
3. Press your eraser stamps onto an ink pad and use them to decorate the blank labels.
4. Combine stamped shapes to make pictures. Use squares and rectangles for a robot, or circles and a triangle for an ice cream cone with a cherry on top.
5. Other ideas: Use a pencil eraser to make polka dots, or your fingers to make dots and ovals (like we did for the purple flower and balloons).
6. Use markers to add words, names, or details.
7. Allow the ink to dry. Affix the bookplate to the inside cover or first page of a book.

FIRST COLORS
In 1903, Crayola sold its first box of crayons—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet, brown, and black—for 5 cents.

RECYCLED CRAYONS

What you'll need

- Old or broken crayons
- Bowl of warm water
- Silicone candy molds in any small to medium shape
- Baking sheet
- Parchment paper or aluminum foil

Instructions

1. If your crayons still have wrappers, peel them off. An easy way to do this is to soak them in a bowl of warm water for 15 to 30 minutes. After soaking them, the wrappers should slide off easily.
2. Line the baking sheet with parchment. Place the silicone mold on the sheet.
3. Break long crayons into smaller pieces. Then sort them however you'd like: by rainbow order, color families (like pinks and reds or blues and greens together), or totally mixed up.
4. Fill molds with broken crayons. Overfill molds. The wax will settle as it melts.
5. Heat oven to 250° F. Place the baking sheet with the molds in the oven.
6. Check on the crayons after 10 minutes. If the wax is too low in the mold, add a few more small pieces and heat for 2 to 5 more minutes, until melted.
7. Let crayons cool completely—up to an hour—and gently pop them out of the molds. Clean the molds: Pop the shapes inside out and use warm, soapy water and a soft brush (like an old toothbrush) to gently scrub out the wax residue. After your crayon sticks cool, use them to make new art!

JODI LEVINE FOR SUPERMAKEIT

DID YOU KNOW?
The sakura, or cherry blossom, is the unofficial national flower of Japan.

TISSUE-PAPER CHERRY BLOSSOM GREETING CARDS

What you'll need

- Twigs with no leaves
- Heavy paper or cardstock, folded in half
- White glue
- Masking tape, optional
- Tissue paper
- Pencil
- Round items (like coins or lids) to trace
- Scissors
- Dull pencil

Instructions

1. Glue a twig to a card. You can lightly tape the stem in place with masking tape as it dries.
2. Stack several layers of tissue paper. With the pencil, trace circles in various sizes onto the top layer. Cut out circles (so you're cutting a few layers of paper at a time).
3. Make a blossom: Take two circles of the same size and stack them together. Hold the edges and use the dull pencil to gently push the center of the circle down. Remove pencil. Twist pointy bottom so that layers are twisted together. Repeat to make more blossoms.
4. Gently remove the tape, if you used it, from your card. Glue the blossoms all over each branch, with smaller blossoms at the top and larger ones as the branch thickens.
5. Write a note to someone special inside the card, then give it to them.

CHALKBOARD-PAINTED BRICK BOOKENDS

What you'll need

- Bricks, left over from home projects or purchased from a home improvement store (look for inexpensive bricks or concrete blocks)
- Cardboard, such as from a shipping box, to protect your work surface
- Optional: primer (like gesso) to create brighter colors
- Paintbrush
- Chalkboard paint
- Chalk
- Optional: felt, scissors, and white glue (to make a soft bottom)

Instructions

1. Cover your work surface with cardboard. If you'd like, paint the bricks with primer—except for the small side that will become the bottom. As a shortcut, you can paint only the sides that will show. Allow the primer to dry completely.
2. Paint the bricks on the top and long sides with chalkboard paint. Let dry.
3. Use chalk to draw or write whatever you'd like onto the bricks—buildings, flowers, notes, or reminders.
4. Optional: To keep the bricks from scratching surfaces, add a protective layer to the bottom. Place the brick on a piece of felt and trace around the bottom. Cut out the shape and glue it to the bottom of the brick.

My 2025 memories

Name Age Grade

What is your favorite memory from 2025?

What are you most proud of when you think back on 2025?

What is something that surprised you about 2025?

Who are the people you spent time with in 2025?

What will you remember most about the year 2025?

GETTY IMAGES

Draw a picture of yourself doing something memorable in 2025, or attach photos from the year that are meaningful to you.

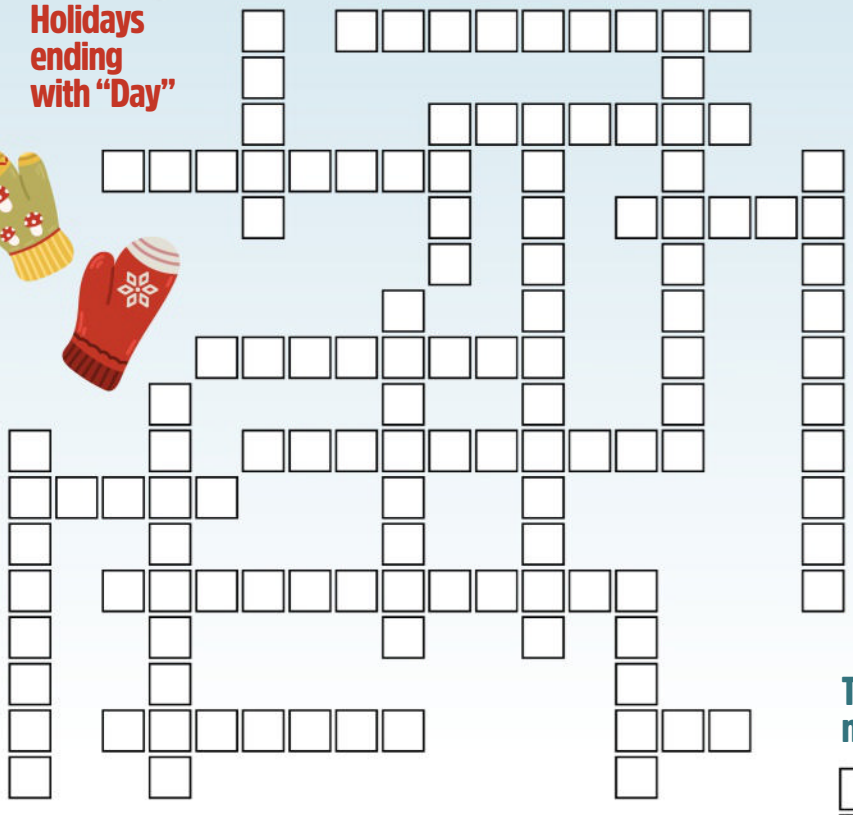
Mighty mind benders!

Calendar crisscrosses

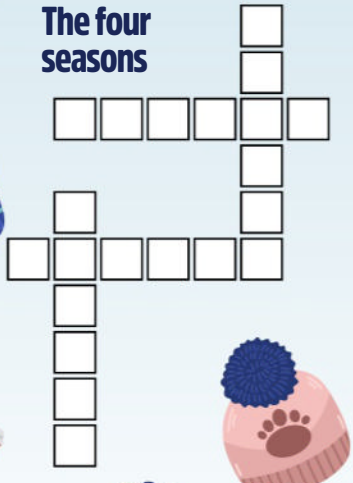
These three crisscrosses are all about the calendar: One for holidays ending with "Day," one for the four seasons, and one for the 12 months. The words you'll need for all three grids are combined in the list below. Can you find where they all go to complete the grids?

ANSWERS CAN BE FOUND ON PAGE 37.

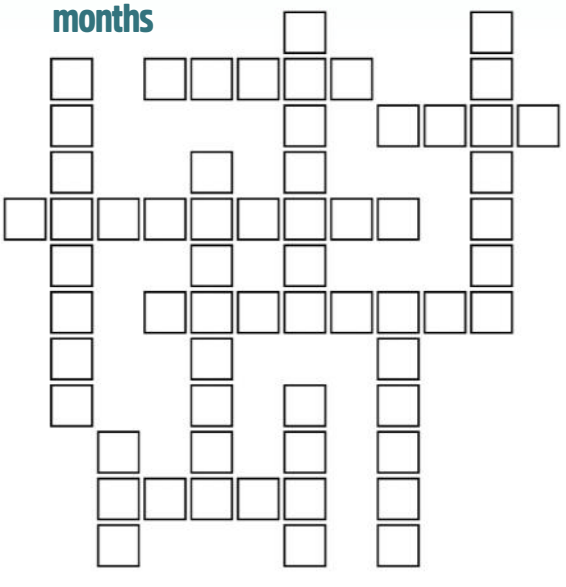
Holidays ending with "Day"



The four seasons



The 12 months



3 letters
MAY
TAX

4 letters
FLAG
JULY
JUNE

5 letters
APRIL
ARBOR
EARTH
LABOR
MARCH
MLK JR.

6 letters
AUGUST
AUTUMN
SPRING
SUMMER
WINTER

7 letters
FATHER'S
JANUARY
MOTHER'S
OCTOBER

8 letters
DECEMBER
ELECTION
FEBRUARY
MEMORIAL
NEW YEAR'S
NOVEMBER
VETERANS

9 letters
CHRISTMAS
GROUNDHOG
SEPTEMBER

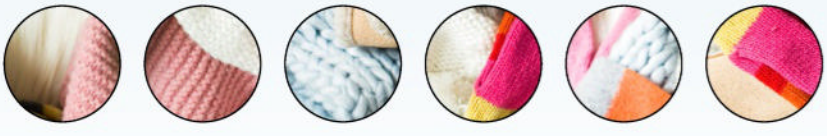
10 letters
APRIL FOOLS'
PRESIDENTS'
VALENTINE'S

12 letters
INDEPENDENCE
THANKSGIVING

PUZZLES BY PUZZABILITY

DETAILS, DETAILS

Six pieces have been removed from this photo of hats, scarves, and mittens. Can you match the circular details under the photo with the numbered sections they came from?

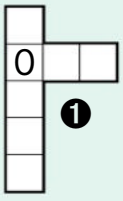


A B C D E F

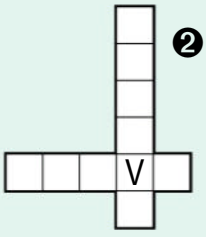
_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

OPPOSITE PAIRS

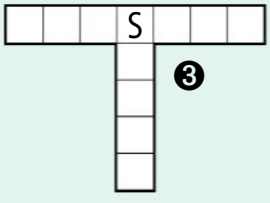
Use the letters given beneath each grid to fill in two words that are opposites, like GIVE and TAKE. The letter where the words cross is given.



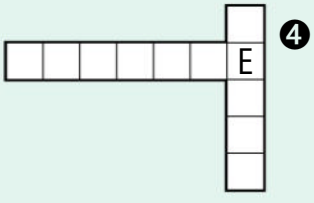
D G L N U Y



A A E E E I L R R



E H H I O P R T U W



B D G H L L O O O Y

MADE TO ORDER

For each category, place the nine trios of letters into the blanks to get three nine-letter words that fit the category. Keep each trio of letters in the order shown without rearranging. One trio has been placed to get you started.

Winter words

ERN	EPL	ARD
FIR	ATE	~~SNO~~
HIB	WBO	ACE

SNO _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

Musical instruments

OPH	ION	ORD
ICA	ONE	MON
HAR	ACC	XYL

_____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

New Year's Eve party

ATE	STR	NTD
OWN	CEL	ERS
EAM	EBR	COU

_____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

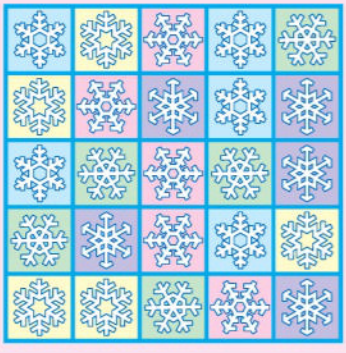
GETTY IMAGES

Up close

Can you identify each of these round things?

Snow banks

Divide this grid into five sections so each section consists of five adjacent boxes containing one of each kind of snowflake. The sections may have different shapes.



JUGGLING ACT

Use the letters S, E, and A in any order to complete each four-letter word.

S	E	A	
V			
		R	
			Y
		F	
	X		
M			

ADD-ONS

First answer as many of the clues as you can. Then place each answer word into one of the stacks so that each word in the stack gains one letter without rearranging the others. The added letter can go anywhere in the word. One letter is given in each stack to help get you started.

❶

I				

- **Chinese side dish**
- **Information on a tag**
- **Marking on a skunk**
- **Reward for a good waiter**
- **Surface for skaters**
- **Take everything off**
- **The son of a king or queen**
- **Vacation journey**

❷

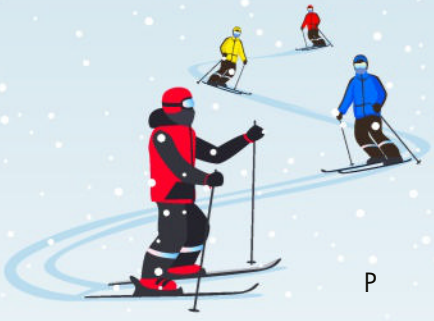
	I			

PUZZLES BY PUZZABILITY

Ski trip word search

Can you find all these words associated with skiing in the grid? They are hidden horizontally, vertically, or diagonally and can be forward or backward. When you're done, read the remaining letters to get a bonus message.

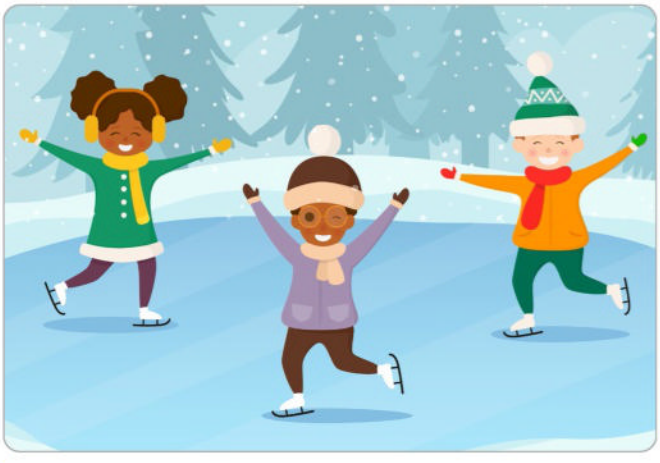
ALPINE
APRES-SKI
BINDINGS
BOOTS
BUNNY SLOPE
CHAIRLIFT
COLD
DOWNHILL
EDGES
GEAR
GLIDE
GLOVES
GOGGLES
GROOMING
HELMET
JUMP
LESSON
LODGE
MOGUL
NORDIC
PEAK
POLES
POWDER
RACE
RUNS
SCHUSS
SEASON
SLALOM
SNOW MACHINE
SPEED
T-BAR
TELEMARK
TRAIL
TURN
WAX
WHITEOUT

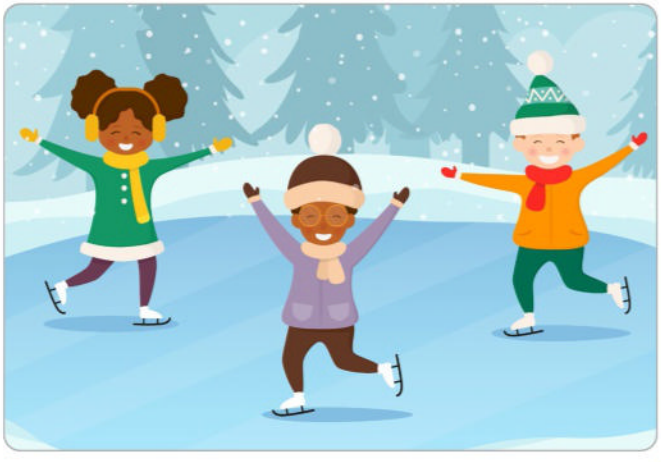


S
H S
E L G R
A C N L
P L E D I L G O
C O A O K H O D D L M S S
T E L E M A R K E N S R A N R U T
U P E T H S O W H I T E O U T S R F O
S I O S P E E D I E B J R R N A C R I T O
N H W U E R A C O L U P D O W N H I L L N B
E A N D D O V S M Y M L E E P T O U E R P T U
D G S E L G G O G P E L A P R E S S K I B A D R
R G I D R Z E G N L D T S K A K I S S I A N L W A X
R A E G G O I U N S W G G N I M O O R G R H O I T C Z E
R L S E P O L S Y N N U B L A S N O W M A C H I N E N D

Spot the difference

These two drawings of kids skating appear to be the same, but take a closer look. There are actually five differences. Can you see them?





GETTY IMAGES

City name game

Can you identify the names and nicknames of these nine US cities? NEED A COUPLE OF HINTS? Check the bottom of the page.

CITIES

- **A** Boston
- **B** Chicago
- **C** Denver
- **D** Detroit
- **E** Los Angeles
- **F** New York
- **G** Philadelphia
- **H** San Francisco
- **I** Seattle

NICKNAMES

- **J** Beantown
- **K** The Big Apple
- **L** The City by the Bay
- **M** The City of Brotherly Love
- **N** The Emerald City
- **O** The Mile High City
- **P** Motor City
- **Q** Tinseltown
- **R** The Windy City

PUZZLES BY PUZZABILITY

Hints: CITY #7 is **A** and NICKNAME #6 is **P**

Cold day word ladder

To change the word VERY into the word COLD, use each clue to fill in a word that is only one letter different from the word before it. Two of the words are highlighted and unclued, and each is shown with two extra letters, one at the start and one at the end. Use the answers above and below those words to determine what four-letter words belong in those boxes to continue the chain. Filling in those two missing answers will turn each one into a six-letter word. Those six-letter words, together, will tell you **what to do if you're very cold after building a snowman.** If you get stuck, try solving from the bottom up.

V E R Y

An action word like "build" or "throw" ▶ _ _ _ _

Parsley or oregano, for example ▶ _ _ _ _

Group of cattle ▶ _ _ _ _

Difficult ▶ _ _ _ _

Body part that might be very cold after building a snowman ▶ _ _ _ _

C _ _ _ _ E

Pressed the doorbell ▶ _ _ _ _

Symbol of marriage ▶ _ _ _ _

Part that a turtledove or partridge uses to fly ▶ _ _ _ _

An adult making a toast might hold a glass of this ▶ _ _ _ _

Row of people waiting in a store ▶ _ _ _ _

Like a stage play, but not like a movie ▶ _ _ _ _

G _ _ _ _ S

Your fingers might not be able to do this if they're very cold ▶ _ _ _ _

"The ___ the merrier" ▶ _ _ _ _

Got dressed in ▶ _ _ _ _

Entry in a dictionary ▶ _ _ _ _

Electrical wire with a plug at the end ▶ _ _ _ _

C O L D

Find the match

Can you tell which two of these pictures of a snowman are identical?

Super code cracker

In this coded list of famous things that were introduced in the 1970s, every letter has been replaced with a substitute. The same substitutions are used throughout the list. Hint: Every X here is an uncoded T. Use the letter patterns you find to crack the code.

K L F X - R X W L X V F

B R F F K R J J H

V C A X Y N C H

A V V F V ' F K R V G V F

F X C A T C A F

C B X A C Z

S A V C Z H S A R N C H

K L G Z V X G C Q G D Q C X L A

GETTY IMAGES

Great and goofy stories

These hilarious happenings from 2025 really brought smiles to our faces. Is the last one real or fake?

That's nuts!

The squirrel that water-skis

Twiggy the water-skiing squirrel made a big splash at the Carolina Classic Fair in North Carolina, where she showed off her sporty skills to delighted crowds. Pulled behind a remote-controlled boat, Twiggy demonstrated water safety in a tiny life vest and performed tricks like turning a full 360 degrees on the skis. The fair called it the "wildest, furriest show on water." Twiggy's trainers—Lou Ann and Chuck Best and their son, Chuck Jr.—have also taught miniature horses, French poodles, and a toad to water-ski.

Brush tender-ly.

Toothpaste that tastes like chicken

Who says toothpaste has to be minty? Fast-food giant KFC joined with dental care company Hismile for a "full-on flavor takeover" inspired by Colonel Sanders' 11 essential ingredients. The pair created a fried chicken–flavored paste designed to keep mouths fresh and clean. Hismile's marketing director admitted, "This started as an April Fools' joke, but we thought, 'Why not make it real?'" The innovative oral care idea quickly sold out, along with a KFC-branded specialty toothbrush with a built-in timer.

One might call them visionary.

Eyes out for public art antics

The town of Bend, Oregon, was struck by a googly-eye bandit. A mysterious prankster placed googly eyes on at least eight public art installations on the city's Roundabout Art Route, including a large sphere and a sculpture of a deer family. Local officials pleaded for an end to the peeper pranks, explaining that the adhesives used to attach the eyes could damage the artwork and removing them can be expensive. But other residents were charmed by the guerrilla googlies. "This town is getting to be so stuffy," one said. "Let's have fun!"

The veggie musicians

A fresh take on making music

Some say not to play with your food, but tell that to the Vegetable Orchestra. For more than 25 years, the Austria-based group has been producing tunes by hollowing out veggies like celery, eggplant, and carrots. "You can make music with everything," the members say—even a "leek violin" or "cucumberphone." The orchestra has performed 344 concerts, which earned it a Guinness World Records title. After each show, any unused vegetables are made into soup and served to the audience.

Grandpa's on a trading card

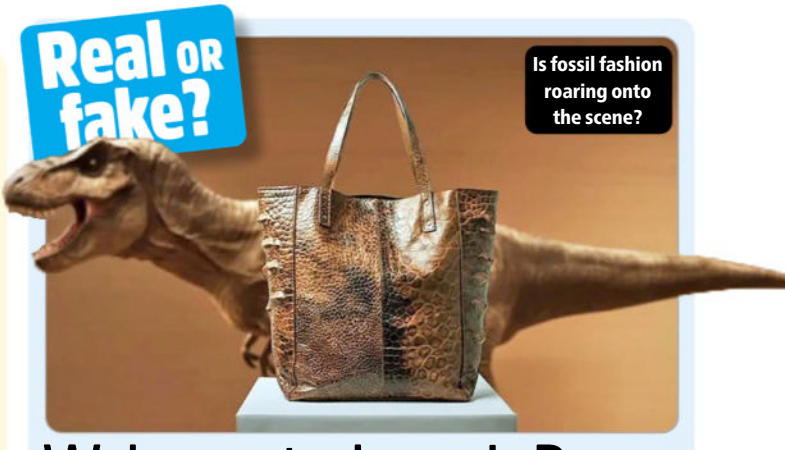
Some kids collect Pokémon cards or baseball cards, but in Kawara, Japan, children became obsessed with trading cards that depict senior citizens. Created by a local official, the collection features 28 *ojisan*, or older men, from the town. Each man, including former fire chief Mr. Honda, age 74, and noodle master Mr. Takeshita, age 81, has special abilities in the game. One fan favorite is Mr. Fujii, a 68-year-old community volunteer, who said, "I never imagined I'd become a trading card, let alone have fans."

A mayoral race gets catty

Election season got hairy in Somerville, Massachusetts, as local cats competed for the position of Bike Path Mayor. Berry, a 3-year-old cat, was originally given the title by her owners because she spends so much time on the path. But this fall, challengers emerged. Campaign signs were put up to support politicking pets, such as Orange Cat of the "Catalyst Party"; Puzzle, the "pro-naps" candidate; and Minerva, whose sign simply said "CRIME." Minerva captured nearly 6,000 votes in a race of 70 pet candidates to win the title.

Hungry hippos, human-style

Families gathered in Michigan to play a real-life version of the board game Hungry Hungry Hippos. In the tabletop game, people try to scoop plastic marbles into the mouths of mechanical hippos. Instead, this event took place on an ice rink, where teams raced around on sleds and used laundry baskets to scoop up as many colorful toy balls as possible. The game was part of the World of Winter, the nation's largest winter festival. "Put me in, coach!" one person joked after seeing a video online.



Welcome to Jurassic Purse

Three European companies teamed up to make luxury handbags from dinosaur skin. Researchers plan to create leather purses using collagen, a protein that provides structure to skin, from Tyrannosaurus rex fossils. A project leader said, "We're unlocking the potential to engineer leather from prehistoric species, starting with the formidable T. rex." Besides looking snazzy, they say the fabric will be "cruelty-free" and will benefit the environment by replacing traditional cowhide. Is this story real, or have you been t-ricked?*

*Real! The team is trying to create the first leather ever made from an extinct species. Many experts doubt they'll succeed, however, since no well-preserved T. rex skin has been found and they would have to use collagen from bones.

DGRI; GETTY IMAGES; @SECOND CHANCE ANIMAL SERVICES/FB; VICTORIA BENNETT, CREATIVE AGENCY; ON LEFT PAGE: GETTY IMAGES; KFC; CITY OF BEND; GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS

Editor's note

It's been a spectacular year for *The Week Junior*. We celebrated our fifth anniversary, and we have more readers than ever before. You wrote us letters, sent us photos, nominated teachers and coaches, shared your recommendations, and entered our contests in record numbers. Our mailbox was always full, and we loved hearing from you!

Our editorial, art, photo, and production teams stayed very busy covering the most important stories in national and international news (p2–5), animals and science (p8–11), sports and arts (p14–17), and much more. We profiled fascinating people (p6–7), reviewed video games (p18) and middle-grade books (p19), offered recipe and craft ideas (p20–23), and shared unbelievable tales to make you smile (p32–33). We also challenged you with puzzles (p26–31) and quizzes (p38) to test your brain power!

We hope you enjoy this issue's look back on 2025. As you're reflecting on the year that's ending, we invite you to use the keepsake form we've created to think about the year ahead (p24). We also hope you'll take a look at all 48 covers we published this year (reprinted on our back cover) and let us know which one was your favorite. Share your opinion (and a photo too!) at *hello@theweekjunior.com*.

Our offices will be closed for the next two weeks, but we will return in January to bring you Issue 299. Until then, thank you from all of us for being a part of *The Week Junior* community and happy new year to you and your families!

Andrea Barbalich
Editorial Director

***The Week Junior* team wishes you an incredible 2026!**

Your year in photos

We received so many fantastic photos from our readers in 2025. Thank you for sharing them with us! You told us about the many ways you are being kind to others. You showed us the recipes and crafts you made from our How To section. You visited amazing places, often taking *The Week Junior* with you. And you wrote to us about your favorite books! As a fun look back, here are some of the reader photos we published this year. We can't wait to see what you send us in 2026! Your photos and stories can be sent to *hello@theweekjunior.com*.

YOU FOUND WAYS TO HELP OTHERS

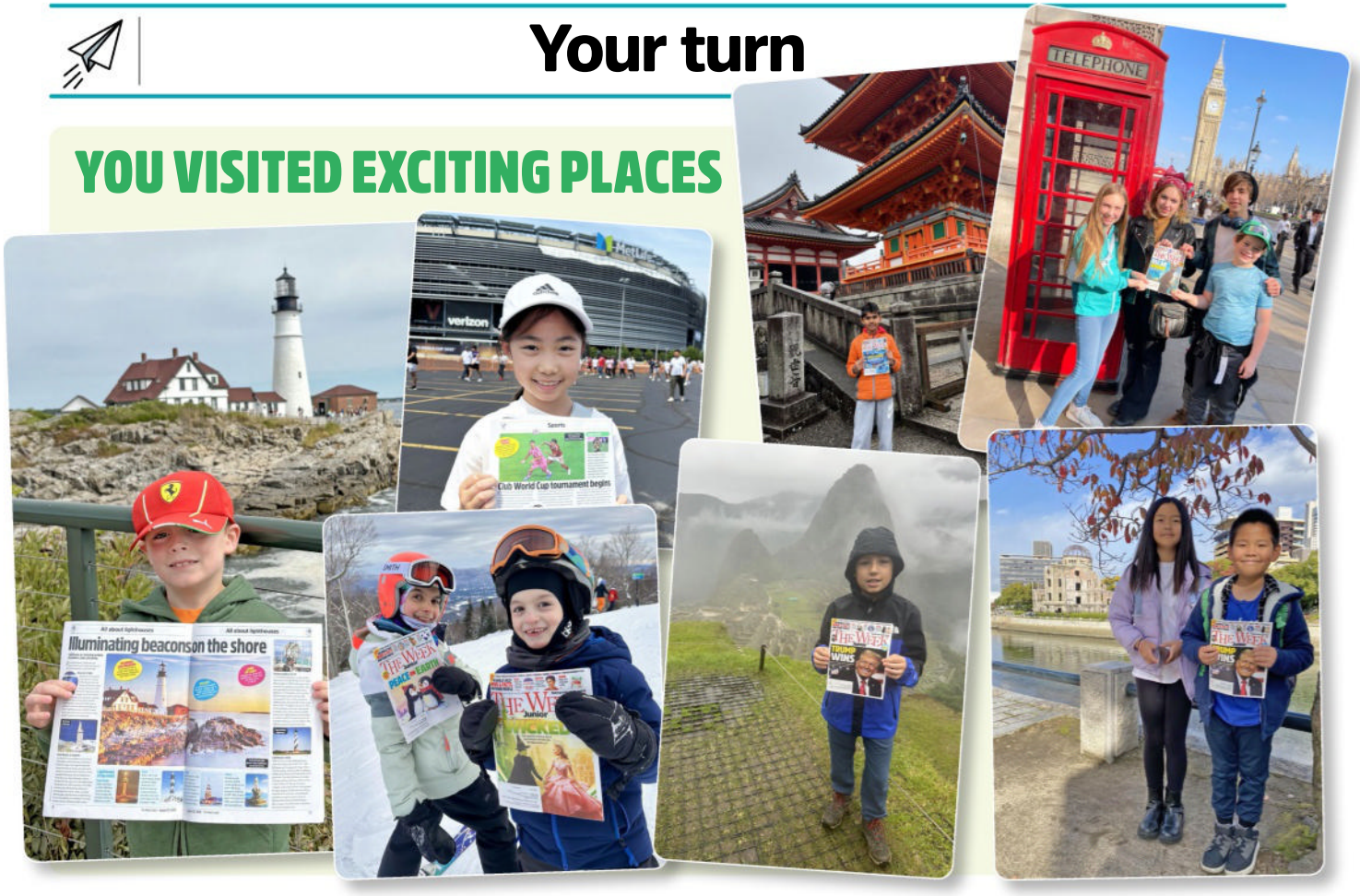
COURTESY *THE WEEK JUNIOR* READERS

THE WEEK Junior IT'S YOUR TURN Email your news, views, and photos to *hello@theweekjunior.com*.

YOU MADE RECIPES AND CRAFTS

We want to hear from you! To have your letters, photos, nominations, recommendations, or ideas considered for inclusion in the magazine, please include your first name, age, and state with your submission. By emailing your submission to us, you give *The Week Junior* consent to publish it in the magazine and online. Please get your parent/guardian's permission before sending anything to us.

YOU VISITED EXCITING PLACES



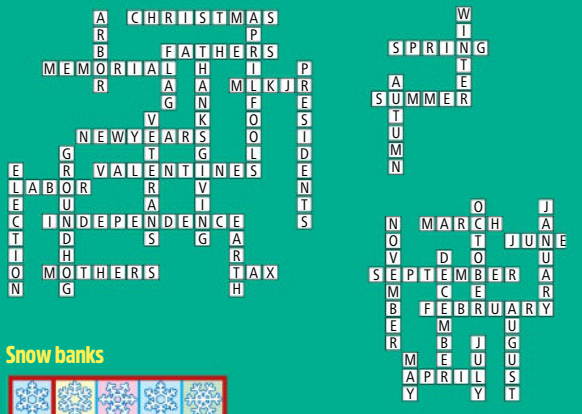
YOU SHOWED US YOUR LOVE OF READING

COURTESY *THE WEEK JUNIOR* READERS

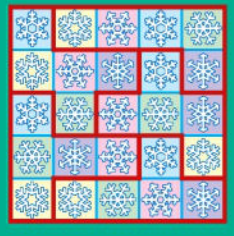
Puzzle and quiz answers

Mighty mind benders! (pages 26–31)

Calendar crisscrosses



Snow banks



Super code cracker

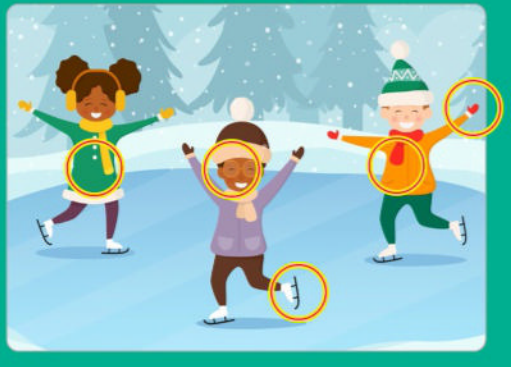
Post-it notes	Star Wars
Miss Piggy	Amtrak
Earth Day	Freaky Friday
Reese's Pieces	Pocket calculator

Opposite pairs

Details, details

1 = E; **2** = A; **3** = F; **4** = D; **5** = C; **6** = B

Spot the difference



Cold day word ladder

VERY
verb
herb
herd
hard
hand
CHANGE
rang
ring
wing
wine
line
live
GLOVES
move
more
wore
word
cord
COLD

Find the match

Numbers 4 and 6 are the same:

Add-ons

1	2
ice	tip
rice	trip
price	strip
prince	stripe

Juggling act

vase
ears
easy
safe
axes
mesa

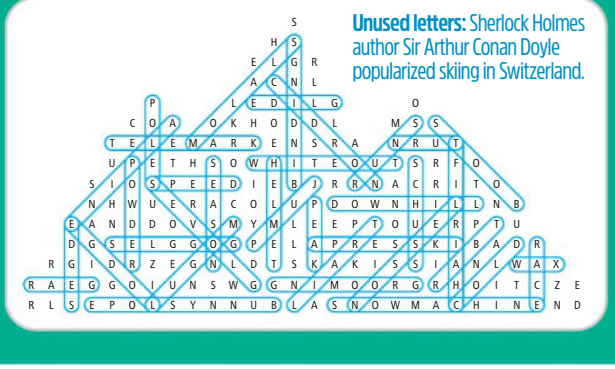
City name game

1. I, N Seattle, The Emerald City
2. B, R Chicago, The Windy City
3. H, L San Francisco, The City by the Bay
4. E, Q Los Angeles, Tinseltown
5. F, K New York, The Big Apple
6. D, P Detroit, Motor City
7. A, J Boston, Beantown
8. G, M Philadelphia, The City of Brotherly Love
9. C, O Denver, The Mile High City

Up close

1. Croquet ball
2. Jefferson nickel
3. The Earth from space
4. Bagel
5. Pool ball
6. Apple
7. The Moon
8. Soccer ball
9. Eyeball
10. Frisbee
11. Glass marble
12. Golf ball

Ski trip word search



Unused letters: Sherlock Holmes author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle popularized skiing in Switzerland.

Made to order

Winter words:
snowboard, fireplace, hibernate

Musical instruments:
harmonica, accordion, xylophone

New Year's Eve party:
streamers, celebrate, countdown

GETTY IMAGES

Quiz (page 38)

1 a) India **2** False. The jewels have not been recovered. **3** b) 1985 **4** *The Life of a Showgirl* **5** c) Jurassic **6** True **7** b) 75th **8** b) Chicago **9** c) Void Company **10** False. They "dance" when they expect food. **11** A'ja Wilson **12** a) Starliner **13** True **14** HUNTR/X **15** a) Minerva

How much of this year's news can you remember?

1 A recent study found that the population of tigers doubled over a period of 12 years in which country?

a) India b) Iran c) Indonesia

a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

2 True or false? French police have recovered the jewels stolen from the Louvre Museum in Paris.

True ☐ False ☐

3 This year's Presidential inauguration was the first held indoors since what year?

a) 1965 b) 1985 c) 2005

a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

4 What is the title of Taylor Swift's record-breaking 12th studio album?

5 Scientists determined that a 150-million-year-old bird called Baminornis zhenghensis lived during which prehistoric period?

a) Cretaceous b) Triassic c) Jurassic

a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

6 True or false? Baseball player Yoshinobu Yamamoto was named the Most Valuable Player of the 2025 World Series.

True ☐ False ☐

7 The popular comic strip *Peanuts* celebrated what anniversary in 2025?

a) 50th b) 75th c) 100th

a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

8 Pope Leo XIV is originally from which city in the US?

a) Boston b) Chicago c) New York

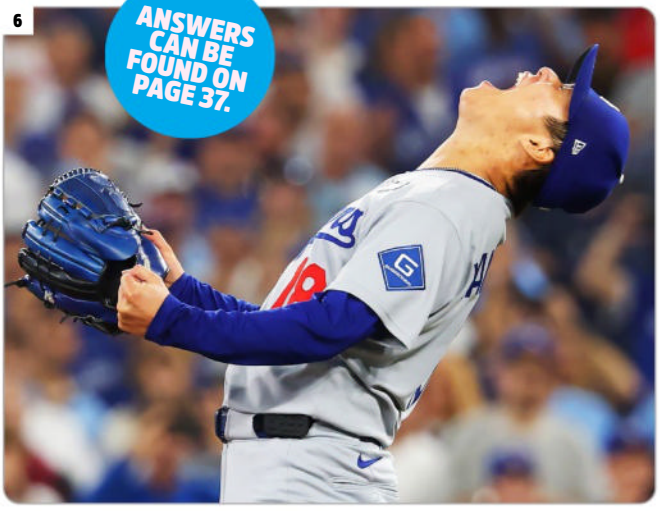
a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

1

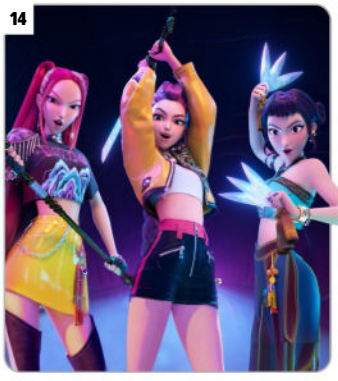
12

ANSWERS CAN BE FOUND ON PAGE 37.

6



14



7

9 In the video game Donkey Kong Bananza, what is the name of the evil company stealing golden bananas?

a) Vicious Company

b) Vile Company

c) Void Company

a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

10 True or false? Baby loggerhead sea turtles "jog" when they expect food.

True ☐ False ☐

11 Which women's basketball player won her second straight WNBA Most Valuable Player award this year?

12 In 2024, NASA astronauts Suni Williams and Butch Wilmore traveled to the International Space Station aboard which spacecraft?

a) Starliner b) SpaceX

c) Crew Dragon

a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

13 True or false? As part of their efforts to revive the extinct woolly mammoth, scientists successfully created woolly mice.

True ☐ False ☐

14 What was the name of the singing group featuring Rumi, Mira, and Zoey in the movie *KPop Demon Hunters*?

15 Which cat was elected Bike Path Mayor in Somerville, Massachusetts, this year?

a) Minerva b) Puzzle c) Orange Cat

a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

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